

**Lt. Governor Becky Skillman's Remarks at the
Stellar Communities Pilot Program Announcement
North Vernon, IN
March 10th, 2011**

It's a good afternoon!

We would expect a stellar welcome from a Stellar Community. This is an exciting day for North Vernon, and an exciting day for the state as well. We are proud too, and excited for you.

It's a special pleasure to be here in Park Theater where we can celebrate your history as we look toward the future.

Several state agencies have played a role in Stellar Communities. You've met David Terrell, director of our Office of Community and Rural Affairs. Here with me today are also Sherry Seiwert, director of the state's Housing and Community Development Authority, and Bob Zier, chief of staff at the Indiana Department of Transportation.

Would all of the individuals on staff in state agencies please stand, wave and be recognized? You know if we take this many people off job it has to be a big deal!

We are delighted to be here with so many partners in progress. Mayor Campbell "Soup" we are so proud of you. And my fellow elected officials, community leaders, business leaders, General Tooley and the Indiana National Guard always make us proud. All of these individuals and more have collaborated to make North Vernon a pilot Stellar Community. Congratulations to you all.

The competition for this program was intense. When we launched the Stellar Communities initiative, 42 communities applied. Twelve communities rose to the top to be among the finalists, but by the end it was clear we had two stellar cities. In the end North Vernon and Greencastle were accepted into the pilot program. I see this as the first step toward moving our state forward, one community at a time.

This is a big step toward the future of government as well. What we accomplish together will be an example of more efficient, strategic local and state government. I hope it will have a lasting impact on our entire state.

I think government works best when it is intentional. It can be efficient and effective as long as it is strategic. That's what Stellar Communities is all about.

These state agencies have separately provided several hundred million dollars a year to cities, towns and counties. The money goes for projects ranging from planning grants to bricks and mortar projects to streetscapes to major neighborhood stabilization. In fact Jennings County has fared very well in the competition for grants in the past.

But in hindsight, state government always had a piecemeal approach to distributing funding to communities. In a city we might help fund a storm water project one year, a new fire engine another year, a community center the third year, and so on. It got the job done, but it left no room for local leaders to look toward long-term, comprehensive planning.

Stellar Communities addresses that kind of inefficiency. Working together now these agencies will communicate better, collaborate effectively and invest strategically. And we can provide larger sums of money for your comprehensive development plans.

North Vernon's plans are a perfect fit with the goals of Stellar Communities. This region has a tremendous asset in the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center. It's a critical part of Indiana's contribution to our nation's war fighter, and I'm proud that your vision for the future is focused on better serving our soldiers and contractors. Meeting the growing needs of this population will benefit the residents of North Vernon, Jennings County and the region exponentially.

The improvements you plan to pursue, from business development, streetscapes, neighborhood revitalization and so much more – add up to a comprehensive plan that will make this community truly stellar.

The state has learned a lot of lessons we can apply going forward, and the other top cities that ultimately did not win have told us how valuable this process has been and how they will benefit from having a strategic investment plan to guide their decisions.

We know that North Vernon will become an even greater economic engine for the region. We can't wait to see what North Vernon will do for Indiana.

Congratulations on a well-deserved honor!